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A Summary of Committee Discussions
NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH ADVISORY COMMITTEE
September 28-29, 1953, Washington, D.C.

The following summary of the discussions during the meeting of the National School Lunch Advisory Committee is intended primarily to outline the background discussions which led to the recommendations the Committee made to the Secretary of Agriculture. It also includes a summary of discussions of items on the agenda for which the Committee felt recommendations were either unnecessary or beyond the purview of the Committee. Although an attempt has been made in these latter instances to also indicate areas of general agreement, it is recognized that such comments do not constitute a Committee recommendation to the Secretary.

Need for Federal Assistance

A member of the Committee suggested that, prior to the discussion of any of the items on the agenda, the Committee should discuss the question as to whether there was a continuing need for Federal school lunch assistance.

There was general agreement among Committee members that the need for a program of Federal school lunch assistance was as great now as it was in 1946 when the National School Lunch Act was passed. It was pointed out that while the Federal assistance program had provided an important impetus to State and local school lunch efforts, only 30 percent of the children in school were now participating in the National School Lunch Program. The group emphasized that recognition needed to be given to the tremendous demands upon available State and local tax funds for school construction programs and other basic educational services now required to bring school systems up to a level that will meet the minimum needs of the substantially increased school population.

During this discussion a question was raised concerning the present method of apportioning Federal cash assistance funds. It was suggested by a Committee member that a more equitable distribution might result if allotments to States were based upon the number of children participating in the program. It was pointed out, however, that insofar as Federal assistance is concerned, this method would necessarily tend to stabilize each State's program at the level achieved when such an apportionment procedure were put into effect.

There was general agreement among Committee members that the apportionment method now prescribed in the National School Lunch Act resulted in an equitable distribution of funds among the States and Territories. The present formula recognized both the school lunch potential of each State (number of school age children) and each State's relative need for assistance (State per capita income).

Support of the present apportionment formula was included in the Committee's recommendations to the Secretary.

More Effective Use of Federal Funds

Selecting Schools; Varying Assistance Rates: Department representatives reviewed for the Committee the actions States have taken since 1947 to develop methods of measuring a school's (or school district's) economic need for Federal assistance for use in selecting schools for participation and in determining rates of assistance for participating schools. The Committee was asked how further progress could be made in this field.

Several members of the Committee stated that they were not certain that the word "need" as used in the Act should be interpreted as economic need. Department representatives pointed out that such interpretations are based not only on the wording of the Act but also on its legislative history (Congressional hearings and reports on the bill, statements made on the floor of the House and the Senate during debate on the passage of the bill, etc.).

Committee members pointed out that there were important needs, other than economic, for school lunch programs. They emphasized that it was a many-sided program--having important education, health and welfare implications for children, as well as implications for the broad effort being made to expand and stabilize domestic food markets. There was, however, general agreement--particularly in view of the limited amount of Federal school lunch funds--that those communities least able to finance an adequate program should have the highest priority in the allocation of Federal funds.

Committee members emphasized that in achieving this objective, each State faced a different but equally complex problem in developing a feasible means to measure relative economic need. (The Department agreed and said it was far from satisfied with the effectiveness of the methods it now uses to measure the relative economic need of the private school lunch programs it administers. In fact, its methods vary among its five areas because it is still experimenting with alternative approaches and techniques.)

The Committee was unanimous in its belief that the solution was not to be found in establishing a Federal regulation to prescribe any single set of standards for measuring economic need that all States would be required to use. Rather, it was the belief of the Committee that the Department faced the task of continuing to work with each State on this matter and that States have the responsibility of continually reviewing and evaluating their methods of distributing Federal funds to insure the most effective use of such funds in the expansion and improvement of school lunch programs.

The Committee summarized its beliefs in this matter in its recommendations to the Secretary.

Review of Meal Types: Department representatives stated that, both from the standpoint of more effective use of Federal funds and in the interest of program simplification, questions had been raised concerning the need for continuing the five meal types now eligible for reimbursement. The Committee was asked if it felt it would be desirable to amend the Secretary's regulations to provide reimbursement for a fewer number of meal types.

The Committee felt, and subsequently recommended to the Secretary, that the objective of increasing the percentage of Type A meals could best be accomplished by cooperative Federal-State efforts within the framework of the present meal type regulations. It pointed to the steady increase in the percentage of Type A meals since 1947. Committee members stated that they felt provisions for other than Type A meals are particularly important for schools with limited facilities or in schools where split sessions are necessary.

Milk Requirements: During the discussion of meal types, several members of the Committee stressed the difficulties their States or communities were experiencing in securing a sufficient supply of fresh, fluid milk. They pointed out that in the Type A pattern this was the only component for which an alternate was not provided. They related instances where school systems were required to pay prices in excess

of those charged other outlets or where schools were unable to secure any price discount based on the economies of large-volume deliveries.

A member of the Committee suggested that States should be asked to provide specific illustrations of such problems to enable the Department to again bring this matter to the attention of milk producer and distributor groups. While there was approval of this approach, the Committee felt, and subsequently recommended, that the Department should amend its meal type regulations to permit the use of alternates having the equivalent nutritive value of one-half pint of fresh, whole milk.

Distribution of Commodities

Audits: A member of the Committee pointed out that he felt that the Federal audit standards for unaccountable losses of direct distribution commodities were unrealistic; in fact, they were far more rigid than standard commercial practices. Department representatives stated that they were continually working with the audit people to achieve a realistic medium between the strictest interpretation of Federal audit procedures and the practical problems faced by States in the intrastate delivery of and accounting for donated commodities. Nonetheless, it is a basic responsibility of the Department to exercise the utmost caution in insuring that Federal funds invested in donated commodities are used for the purpose the Congress intended.

Members of the Committee pointed to the excellent record of the School Lunch Program--that cases involving negligence or fraud are few and far between. The Department agreed and stated that even though it has investigated all complaints received, only a very small amount of school lunch administrative funds have been required for this purpose by PMA's compliance and investigation office. When complaints are received, it is the policy of the Department to investigate such complaints with the full knowledge and cooperation of the State agency.

Distribution Policies: Committee members said, in response to a question by the chairman, that there was general understanding of the Department procedures permitting a State or a school to accept or reject any or all of the supply of a surplus food offered by the Department. The Department also stated that the suggested rates of distribution provided to States were to be regarded only as guides. States were free to vary rates for individual schools above or below such guides, based upon the school's ability to effectively utilize the various commodities.

In donating Section 32 foods the Department stated that when the supply of any food is limited it gives first priority to schools. Except for this general restriction, a State is free to determine how its allotment of Section 32 foods can best be utilized within the State.

It was reported to the Committee that, at the request of the President, the Department was working with the Foreign Operations Administration on a proposed program to provide Christmas food packages for Germany and other European and Asiatic countries. Because of the shortness of time, some surplus foods earmarked for school lunch may be diverted to this program and replaced at a later date. It was pointed out that this might result in delayed deliveries of some shipments of Section 32 commodities to States.

Program Simplification

Reporting Procedures: The Department outlined a proposed simplification of school lunch reporting procedures which had been suggested by the California State agency. The proposal would limit monthly reports from States to the Department to information on meals served, reimbursement paid, and food purchased. Other information, primarily data on the financial status of the program, would be reported on a cumulative basis at least twice a year. Although States would be expected to continue their efforts to encourage schools to use plentiful foods, regular reporting of plentiful food purchases would be replaced by sample surveys that would be undertaken from time to time.

States also would be permitted to make similar simplifications in the monthly reports from individual schools.

Committee members expressed complete approval of this approach to reporting simplifications. They felt the Department should pursue its proposed plan of securing the advice of States in working out the details of the procedure. (Department representatives had stated that they planned to ask the five area research committees--composed of State school lunch supervisors--to undertake the work of securing the advice and suggestions of the States.)

The Committee felt that the option to States concerning the simplification of local reports was very important. Some States, they pointed out, might not be in a position to undertake that great a simplification because of basic school or State reporting procedures. The opinion was also expressed that some States feel that the full monthly report insures proper accounting procedures in the individual schools. Others stated that they felt States would want to be sure they would not lose important information on the changing financial status of individual programs before instituting such a simplified local reporting procedure.

Reporting of Free Meals: Several members of the Committee stated they believed that the confusion concerning the definition of a "free meal" was causing both reporting and audit difficulties. They felt that both among States and among schools within a State different interpretations were being used and that, in most instances, some "free meals", as intended by the Act, were not being reported. This was particularly true, they believed, in cases where a child rendered some token work in exchange for his lunch.

The Committee agreed that an attempt should be made to clear up any misunderstandings by issuing a new general interpretation and instruction on free meal reporting. In its recommendations to the Secretary, the Committee suggested a definition of free meals for reporting purposes. It also suggested, during the discussions, that the Department should submit the suggested definition to the States for their comments and suggestions.

Application Procedure: A member of the Committee asked if the Department intended to simplify its application procedure. (The Department had asked States for their comments on such action during the area conferences held during the summer with State school lunch supervisors.)

The Department stated that it was going to institute the new procedure, which provides for more flexibility, effective next year. Since there was uncertainty on this matter among the States, it would inform States of its plans in this regard. The new procedure is now being drafted and is scheduled for release in time to meet State printing deadlines.

Federal, State and Local Relationships in Program Administration

This discussion was directed primarily toward the importance of securing the support of school administrators in the improvement of school lunch operations.

A member of the Committee stated that to be of greatest assistance to the school lunch people, the local school administrator must be familiar with the mechanics of the program; understand the program's broad objectives; and realize the educational opportunities a school lunch program presents. It was also pointed out that when the local school administrator does not understand the objectives of the program, State school lunch personnel cannot effectively work with the school to improve its lunchroom operations.

The Committee agreed that tremendous progress has been made in securing understanding and support of school lunch programs at all levels of school administration and among boards of education. They pointed to the fact that an increasing number of States now include school lunch discussions during county or State school administrator meetings and that school administrators attend school lunch workshops in many States. Some States now include the school lunch program in their general school evaluation program. Almost every school now being constructed, the committee said, includes food service facilities and a great deal of work is undertaken to see that the lunchrooms are properly designed and equipped.

Despite substantial progress, the Committee agreed that continuing efforts needed to be made by all groups concerned with school lunches.

The State school lunch supervisors on the Committee were asked by the representative of the U. S. Office of Education if they felt the division in which the school lunch program was located within the State department had a bearing on their effectiveness. There was general agreement with the statement of one supervisor that the place of the school lunch program in the formal organization of the State agency is not particularly significant as long as the Chief State School Officer is interested in the program and the school lunch supervisor is able to work cooperatively with administrators in charge of other phases of the State department of education's work.

The School Lunch Budget

A member of the Committee expressed the belief that the Committee might want to indicate to the Secretary its feeling with regard to the level of the Federal school lunch appropriation for 1954-55.

(During the opening session of the meeting, Mr. Gordon, Administrator of the Production and Marketing Administration, had told the group that the Department was not able to discuss the 1955 budget situation at this time. He told the group that no final decision on budget matters would be made until the Bureau of the Budget had made its recommendations and the President had finally approved the entire Federal budget.)

Committee members asked the Department Chairman if such action by the Committee would be appropriate. The Chairman stated although the Department was not in a position to discuss its 1955 school lunch budget recommendation with the Committee, his did not preclude a budget discussion by Committee members. However, since he had been asked the question, he would answer it and say it was his opinion that a Committee recommendation on the budget would be inappropriate. In explaining his opinion, he pointed out that the Production and Marketing Administration had had full

opportunity to explain the needs of the school lunch program to the Department Committee directly handling budget matters for the Secretary. However, the Secretary must take into account many complex factors in recommending to the President the budget requests for the various programs of the Department. The President, of course, has an even more complex task in making decisions on the entire Federal budget.

At the conclusion of this discussion, Committee members generally agreed it would be inappropriate for them to make a recommendation concerning one part of the Department's budget. They pointed out, however, that they felt the tone of their report to the Secretary indicated their feelings in this matter.

Future Work of the Committee

Committee members stated that they felt an advisory committee of this type could be of great assistance to the Department in planning for continuing improvements in the National School Lunch Program. They did not feel, however, that they should make any formal recommendations to the Secretary on this matter.

In the event that additional meetings of such a group were held, members of the Committee suggested that specific time might well be set aside to permit subcommittees to work on specific problems and to develop recommendations. Two topics for discussion at a subsequent meeting were suggested: (1) The Department's State agency review program; and (2) program services and aids--what services schools need, techniques to insure the increased use of available aids, and Federal and State responsibilities in this phase of program operations.





